



IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Appl. No. : 10/049,749
Applicant : Michael Charles SHEPPARD and
Thomas Harvey ZIMMERMAN
Filed : 26 June 2002
Int'l Filing Date : 13 July 2000
Title : DOWNHOLE SENSING APPARATUS WITH SEPARABLE
ELEMENTS
TC/A.U. : 2856
Examiner : Fayyaz, N.S.
Docket N° : 57.0320 US PCT

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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Commissioner for Patents, PO Box 1450 Alexandria, VA 22313-1450, on <u>5/2/03</u>	
<u>Ruth A. Schreiber</u> Ruth Schreiber	<u>5/2/03</u> Date

DECLARATION UNDER 37 CFR 1.132

Honorable Commissioner for Patents
PO Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Sir:

I, William L. Wang, declare as follows:

1. All statements made herein of my own knowledge are true, and all statements made herein on information and belief are believed to be true.
2. I am currently the Intellectual Property Law Counsel for Schlumberger Cambridge Research Ltd. and have been employed in the Intellectual Property Law Department of Schlumberger Cambridge Research, Ltd (hereinafter the "IP Law Department") since November 1998. I am an authorized attorney for the above-identified patent application, and I am familiar with the invention claimed in the above-identified patent application.

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3. Based on correspondence in the IP Law Department files, I believe that prior to 17 May 1999 the IP Law Department requested Dr. Helen Forsyth of the UK patent attorney firm of Keith W Nash & Co to prepare a draft patent application based on a written disclosure originating from the two named inventors of the above-identified US patent application, namely Michael Charles Sheppard and Thomas Harvey Zimmerman.

4. Based on correspondence in the IP Law Department files, I believe that prior to 17 May 1999 the IP Law Department received from Dr. Forsyth of Keith W Nash and Co a draft patent application based on the written disclosure and requesting some additional information.

5. On 17 May 1999, a draft patent application, a photocopy of which is attached hereto as Exhibit A, was received by the IP Law Department from Michael Charles Sheppard. I believe this date to be accurate from the date stamp attached to first page of the draft patent application and from other electronic records of the IP Law Department which indicate the date of receipt of the draft patent application in our department was 17 May 1999. The draft patent application of Exhibit A includes hand-written comments from Michael Charles Sheppard. Apart from these hand-written comments, the draft of Exhibit A is substantially identical to the draft patent application referred to above in paragraph 4.

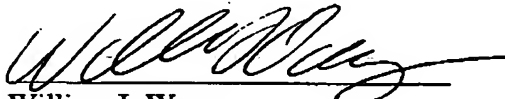
6. Schlumberger Cambridge Research, Ltd., including its IP Law Department is and was on 17 May 1999 located in the United Kingdom, a WTO member country.

7. It can be seen from the draft patent application draft of Exhibit A that the subject matter of claims 1-11 and 13 of the above-identified US patent application had been conceived at least as early as the date the draft was received, 17 May 1999. In particular, the subject matter is described in the specification, drawings, and corresponds to claims 1-12 in the draft patent application of Exhibit A.

8. The priority filing for the above-identified US patent application was duly filed in the UK Patent Office on 14 July 1999. A certified copy of the GB patent application (the priority document) was received by the International Bureau of WIPO on 16 August 2000 in connection with the international (PCT) phase of the present application.

9. I understand that willful false statements and the like are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both (18 U.S.C. 1001) and may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

I sign this 2nd day of May 2003.


William L Wang

C761/S

DraftTitle: Sensing Apparatus

→ Peter Lee

Field of the invention

The invention relates to a sensing apparatus particularly suitable for use downhole within oil and gas wells.

Background to the in

Gathering of information wireline into a well, such as fluid velocity by telemetry along the well, and retrieval of the tool.

PATENTS	
DATE RECEIVED	17 MAY 1999
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BY LWW	W

Case No.	57.0320
Date	17.5.99
Load	
Activity Rep.	
Work-Office Doc.	

Self-powered robotic

wireline. It is relatively easy to get a self-powered robotic device to the bottom of a well because downwards travel of the device involves moving from smaller diameter production tubing to larger diameters at the bottom of the well. However difficulties occur in retrieving such devices because the return journey to the surface involves locating, and passage through, the smaller diameter opening.

It is one aim of the present invention to provide a sensing apparatus which at least in part overcomes the existing difficulties with robotic logging devices.

Summary of the invention

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, there is provided sensing apparatus comprising a housing and sensing means, characterised in that the housing contains a plurality of separable elements to which data acquired by the sensing means is transferred, and which are releasable, after data transfer, from the housing.

The separable elements act as passive receptors for data acquired from the sensing means, and in this way, an autonomously powered device can be sent downhole and left in place while data is transferred to the surface over time by sending the separable

C761/S

DraftTitle: Sensing ApparField of the invention

The invention relates
oil and gas wells.

Background to the in

Gathering of information relating to a well is possible by lowering a logging tool on a wireline into a well. The logging tool acquires data relating to the well characteristics, such as fluid velocity and temperature, and typically transmits the logged data to surface by telemetry along the wireline. However logging tools on wirelines often get caught within the well, leading to problems of acquiring data at desired positions and also retrieval of the tool.

Self-powered robotic logging devices have been developed to avoid the need for use of a wireline. It is relatively easy to get a self-powered robotic device to the bottom of a well because downwards travel of the device involves moving from smaller diameter production tubing to larger diameters at the bottom of the well. However difficulties occur in retrieving such devices because the return journey to the surface involves locating, and passage through, the smaller diameter opening.

It is one aim of the present invention to provide a sensing apparatus which at least in part overcomes the existing difficulties with robotic logging devices.

Summary of the invention

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, there is provided sensing apparatus comprising a housing and sensing means, characterised in that the housing contains a plurality of separable elements to which data acquired by the sensing means is transferred, and which are releasable, after data transfer, from the housing.

The separable elements act as passive receptors for data acquired from the sensing means, and in this way, an autonomously powered device can be sent downhole and left in place while data is transferred to the surface over time by sending the separable

elements back to the surface, so extending the useful lifetime of the sensing apparatus.

The sensing means may include or be connected to electronic memory means which temporarily stores the acquired data. The stored data can be downloaded to a further memory device in a separable element when required.

Preferably the sensing apparatus comprises actuable port means, openable to release the separable elements.

Preferably the separable elements each comprise a rigid casing, with a sealable aperture, the casing surrounding data storage means, such as a memory chip, in which the acquired data is stored for transfer to the surface. The aperture allows a connection to be made to the data storage means therein so that data can be written thereto. Closure and sealing of the aperture permits watertight sealing of the element to protect the memory chip from wellbore fluids once the separable element is released.

Preferably the aperture is surrounded by a sealing material, typically made of thermosetting plastics material, which can be heat treated within the housing so as to provide a fluid-tight seal which is continuous with the casing surface. This improves the robustness of the separable element.

The separable elements are preferably spherical so as to reduce the likelihood that they will snag on protrusions within the interior of the well. Thus typically each separable element will comprise two hollow metal hemi-spheres, joined by a plastics seal to form a sphere.

Preferably the separable elements are also configured to be either neutrally buoyant, or buoyant, in relation to well fluids, so that they are easily carried to surface.

Generally the separable elements have a diameter in the range of 1 to 10cm, and more preferably in the range 1 to 5cm, so that they can easily transfer from downhole large diameter sections to smaller diameter tubing nearer the surface. Typically a large number of separable elements are contained in the housing, of the order of 100-500 elements.

The housing of the sensing apparatus and the casings of the separable elements may be formed from plastics material or metal.

The invention also lies in the provision of separable elements in a downhole sensing apparatus as aforesaid.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is also provided a method of acquiring data from downhole, comprising placing downhole a sensing apparatus containing a number of separable elements and releasing the elements to carry acquired data to the surface as required.

The invention will now be described by way of example, and with reference to, the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a schematic diagram of a sensing apparatus according to the present invention during travel downhole;

Figure 2 shows a cross-section of the sensing apparatus; and

Figure 3 shows a section along line III-III of Figure 2.

Description

In Figure 1, a completed well 10 is shown, with production tubing 12 cemented into position centrally within a borehole 14. The production tubing 12 is capped at surface and an autonomous sensing apparatus or tool 16, which has been transferred through a cap 20 to travel downhole under its own power, is shown passing down the wellbore 14 from position A to position B, and thence to beyond position C where it emerges into the completion.

As the tool 16 passes downhole, data is either acquired continuously by the tool 16 or acquired at fixed depths along the wellbore 14, with the tool 16 measuring various characteristics including pressure, temperature, flow rate and chemical species. These measurements are referenced to the position in the completion either by counting casing collars and using existing knowledge of the location of perforation sites within the walls of the completion, or by integrating the velocity of the tool as derived from on-board sensors.

The velocity of the tool 16 is typically sensed by including a pair of sonic source/sensor packages or a pair of infra red source/sensor packages to sample the borehole wall and configure such that cross-correlation of the source/receiver pair will provide velocity of

the tool.

[Improved diagram of wellbore needed, showing structure at top of production tubing which allows the tool to enter the production tubing, and also showing the change in diameter of tubing and completion with depth.]

The sensing apparatus 16 is shown in cross-section in Figure 2. This robotic device has a body 22 with a total length of around 2.1m and is generally comprised of three sections, a rear 24, a front 26 and a middle section 30. The middle section 30 is a hollow cylindrical metal casing of diameter 0.114m which contains and surrounds components carried by the device 16. Attached to each end of the middle section 30 are respective cone sections 32, 34 which are truncated with a hemi-spherical surface to improve the aerodynamic structure of the device.

The first cone 32 forms a front nose of the device 16, with the second cone 34 attached to the rear of the casing carrying a propeller 36. To strengthen the device 16, an internal carbon fibre wall 40 formed as a hollow cylinder around 7mm wall thickness is inserted into the middle section 30 to improve rigidity and robustness of the device 16, and also to protect components contained within the middle section when downhole. The carbon fibre wall 40 thus encases active sensing and data storage components which are contained within the device 16, and the wall 40 is generally provided with a number of individual compartments so that different parts of the middle section 30 can be sealed with respect to other compartments.

Towards the rear end of the middle section 30, a motor 42 is provided which is attached to the propeller 36 carried on the second cone 34. The motor 42 and other electrical components within the device are powered by three batteries 44 arranged in series, and the motor 42 turns the propeller 36 to drive the device 16 downhole. Where the motor 42 and propeller 36 are attached, shaft seals 46 are used to ensure that the rear end of the middle section is sealed against external fluid.

A ballast holder 50 is placed centrally of the middle section 30, and an appropriate amount of ballast introduced into this container so that the tool 16 is neutrally buoyant, i.e. it neither sinks nor rises within the fluid downhole. This ensures that the tool 16 can be powered through the produced fluids by the motor 42 and associated propeller 36. A variety of sensors 52, 54, 56, 58 are included within the body of the device 16 to sense various parameters downhole including pressure, temperature, flow rate, chemical species, magnetic flux and fluid composition. The data provided by the sensors 52, 54,

The compartment need not be sealed hermetically. The memory fish are completely sealed devices communicating ~~with~~ with the base in the main vessel either inductively or by any other ~~non-contact~~ indirect means such as infra red or by direct contact through electrical pin conductors. The fish are mechanically lifted from their mating locations just prior to release.

The fish are essentially chips embedded in low density plastic and can be as small as a centimeter squared or less and larger if necessary. Capture of the fish at surface can be enhanced by suitable size and shape of the plastic body of the fish.

56, 58 is stored in data acquisition and control board 62 which, like the motor 42, is powered by the three batteries 44.

Towards the front end of the middle section, a large number of releasable elements 64, or memory fish, are contained in a front compartment 68 which is sealed from the remainder of the device. The releasable elements 64 are carried on and detachably connected to a bus 66 which is in electrical communication with the data acquisition and control board 62. The front compartment 68 is provided with a flap 70 in its external wall, which whilst normally closed, opens to allow release of selected fish in response to a command from the control board 62. The control board 62 is pre-programmed at surface before the device 16 goes downhole with a program which instructs release of the elements 64 in a chosen manner, typically to release a small number of fish at spaced apart intervals of time over a few years.

G — [Is the compartment sealed? How are the memory fish released, it is through lifting the cone, or through a flap as described? Need to describe connection of memory fish to bus and electrical pathways between bus and control board.]

Each fish 64 comprises a hollow sphere 72 of around 3 to 5cm diameter made substantially of metal and which encases a memory chip 74 to which data can be downloaded via bus 66 from the data acquisition and control board 62. The sphere 72 has an aperture 76 surrounded by heat sealable material, such as thermosetting plastics material. Electrodes 80 on the bus 66 interconnect with the memory chip 74 of each fish 64 by protruding into the sphere through the aperture as shown in Figure 3 so as to establish an electrical connection with the chip. When a fish is ready for release, it is raised to separate it from the electrodes on the bus, the opening sealed by use of a heating element on the sealable material so as to form a substantially smooth water-tight sphere, and then released. The smooth sphere is then robust and resistant to ingress of fluid.

← [Information needed on dimensions and sealing of fish. How is sealing this achieved, what is seal made from?]

The robotic device 16 can carry up to hundreds of small memory fish 64, which are either neutrally buoyant or partially buoyant and after each set of measurements instructed via the control board 62, the board downloads the collected data to a chosen number of fish 64, and then instructs separation of the selected fish from the bus 66, sealing of the spheres 74 ready for release, and then opening of flap 70 to release the

spheres 74. The fish released into the fluid flowing in the well are swept upwards and are then retrieved at surface. Typically the same data is written to more than one fish so that the chances of retrieval of the data are maximised.

Before release of the memory fish 64 into the flow, the tool 16 is programmed to send an acoustic signal into the fluid or the tubulars so as to alert crew at surface that the release is about to take place and that steps should be taken to retrieve the memory fish. *Or the fish may be released at a predetermined time.*

[How is acoustic signal produced?]

a transducer in the fluid or pressed against the wall of the tubulars.

By using the memory fish 64, a robotic production logging device which has been sent to the bottom of a well can lie within the well over a period of time whilst still providing measurements that can be sent to surface via the fish. By providing a large number of memory fish, typically 300-500, within the sensing apparatus and releasing these at selected intervals, the well can be monitored over, for example, 3 to 5 years.

With a robotic logging device, it is much easier to send the device to the bottom of a well than it is to get it to travel back to surface. This is largely because of the geometry of the tubulars used to encase the internal wall of the well structure as when the robotic device travels from position A to position C, for example, the device moves from smaller diameter tubes of the production tubing to larger tubes of the completion. For the robotic device to travel back to surface, it must travel from a larger diameter tube into a smaller opening, which involves difficulties with locating and entering the smaller tubing. The present invention allows the logging device to remain downhole, whilst still permitting logged data to reach the surface by using the small passive data receptors to carry data to surface by being carried up within the fluid to the surface.

The tool can thus sample the well over depth and over periods of time to provide information about the evolution of the downhole flow and fluid character, both of a chemical and physical nature. The device provides a simple production logging tool which avoids well intervention and ensures that wells can be logged cheaply when a convention approach would be too costly.

The sensing apparatus does not necessarily need to be an autonomously powered device, but could be provided either on wireline or even within the casing used to complete the well.

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Claims

1. A sensing apparatus comprising a housing and sensing means, characterised in that the housing contains a plurality of separable elements to which data acquired by the sensing means is transferred, and which are releasable, after data transfer, from the housing.
2. A sensing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the sensing means includes or is connected to electronic memory means which temporarily stores the acquired data.
3. A sensing apparatus according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the sensing apparatus further comprises an actuatable port means, openable to release the separable elements.
4. A sensing apparatus according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the separable elements each comprise a rigid casing with a sealable aperture, the casing surrounding data storage means in which the acquired data is stored for transfer to the surface.
5. A sensing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the sealable aperture is formed by an aperture surrounded by a sealing material, with the sealing material being heat treatable within the housing so as to provide a fluid-tight seal which is continuous with the casing surface.
6. A sensing apparatus according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the separable elements are spherical.
7. A sensing apparatus according to claim 6, wherein each separable element comprises two hollow metal hemi-spheres, joined by a plastics seal to form a sphere.
8. A sensing apparatus according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the housing of the sensing apparatus and casings of the separable elements are formed from plastics material or metal.

9. A sensing apparatus according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the separable elements are configured to be either neutrally buoyant or buoyant, in relation to well fluids.
10. A sensing apparatus according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the separable elements have a diameter in the range of 1 to 10cm.
11. A sensing apparatus according to any of the claims 1 to 9, wherein the separable elements have a diameter in the range 1 to 5cm.
12. A method of acquiring data from downhole, comprising placing downhole a sensing apparatus containing a number of separable elements and releasing the elements to carry acquired data to the surface as required.
13. Apparatus and method substantially as herein described with reference to, and as illustrated in, the accompanying drawings.

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AbstractTitle: Sensing Apparatus

A sensing apparatus (16) is provided for use downhole, comprising a housing (22) and sensing means (52, 54, 56, 58) with the housing (22) containing a plurality of separable elements (64) to which data acquired by the sensing means (52, 54, 56, 58) is transferred. The separable elements (64) are releasable from the housing to convey the acquired data to surface. The separable elements have a spherical outer casing (72) of around 1 to 10cm diameter which surrounds a memory chip (74). The casing (72) has a sealable aperture (76) so that electrical connection to the chip (74) can be established within the housing.

[Figure 2]



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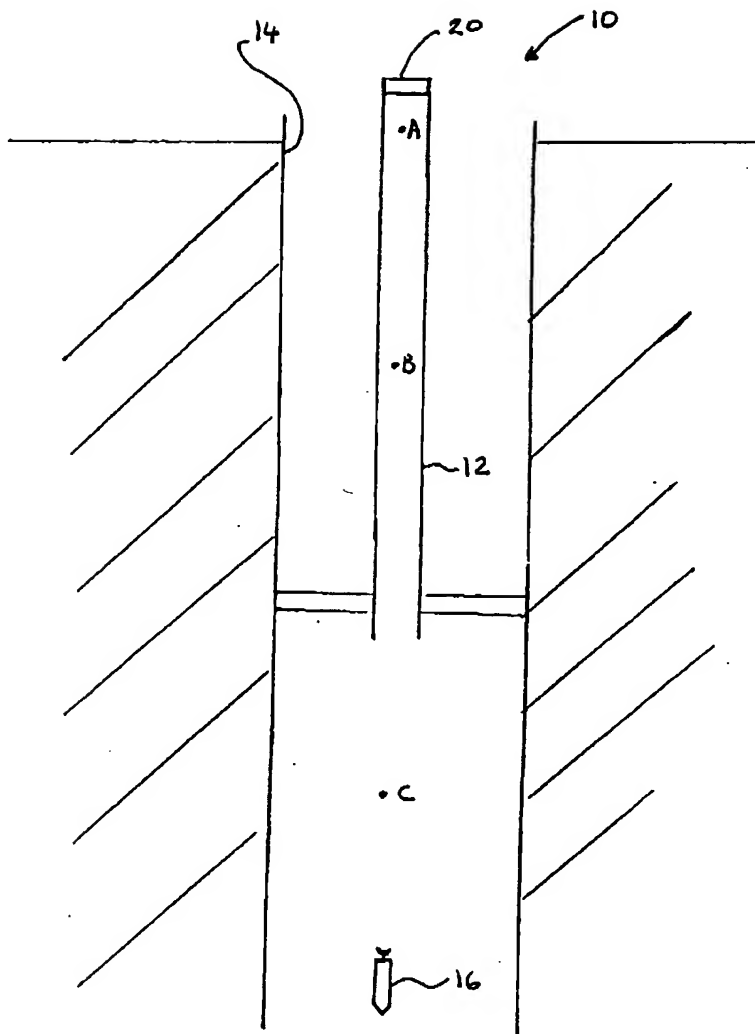


Figure 1

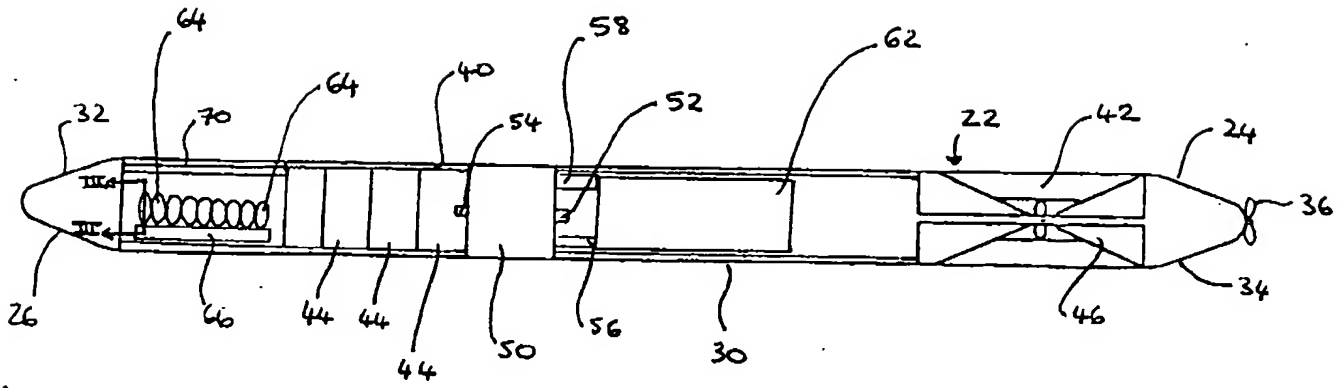


Figure 2

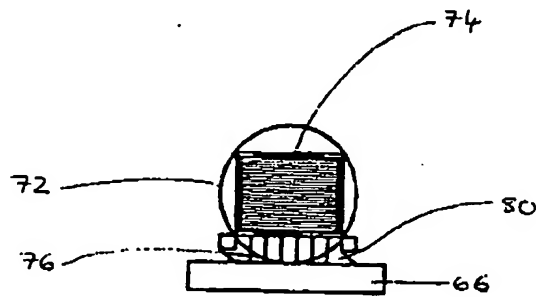


Figure 3